

Sexual Abuse: Recognizing and Reporting

Possible indicators of sexual exploitation:

- **The student self-discloses to you** (possibly following a lesson on communication).
- **The student acts differently from his or her usual pattern**, in troubled ways:
 - ✓ Regressing to more baby-like behavior
 - ✓ Clinging to you or another staff person
 - ✓ Cranky or hostile
 - ✓ Sleeping in class or lacking energy
 - ✓ Developing lots of minor ailments (headaches, stomach aches, lack of appetite)
 - ✓ Acting reluctant to leave school at the end of the day
 - ✓ Dressing provocatively or wearing many layers of clothing even during hot weather

These behaviors, of course, could signal other distress, but it never hurts to describe to a student what you have observed and ask if you can help with “a problem.”

- **One student confides that another student was exploited.**

What to do if a student does confide or if you have “reasonable cause to believe” that sexual exploitation has occurred:

- **Believe the student and say, “I believe you.”**
- **Tell the student, “It’s not your fault, I care about you, and I’m glad that you told me.”**
- **Speak privately with the student and maintain the student’s confidentiality within the school, except to notify your principal ... and , at most, to enlist the help and support of one other staff person (school nurse, counselor, social worker). But do NOT discuss the situation openly in the staff room, for example, or with anyone who doesn’t have a compelling need to know.**
- **Report the abuse.** Specific reporting laws differ from state to state, but in general, you are required to report suspected abuse to either the police or your child protection agency.* It is **NOT sufficient to “turn the case over” to your principal or anyone else.** You are required by law either to report it yourself or make certain it has been reported by another person (by being in the room at the time). And you do not need to know for certain that abuse has occurred to be obligated to report. All you need is reasonable cause to believe it has occurred; it is CPS’s job to investigate, not yours.
- **If you need or want *support* for yourself or the child in reporting the suspected abuse, seek professional help.****

* In King County, WA, report concerns to Child Protective Services (1-800-609-8764 during business hours, 1-800-562-5624 during nights and weekends). Report abuse of adults 18+ who are developmentally disabled to Aging and Adult Intake Services (206-341-7660).

** In King County, WA, for support and advice, call King County Sexual Assault Center (1-888-99-VOICE), Children’s Response Center (425-688-5130) or Harborview Center for Sexual Assault & Traumatic Stress (206-521-1800).

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